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OPEN AND AFFIRMING · JUST PEACE · GLOBAL MISSION · CREATION JUSTICE/GREEN FAITH

Pentecost Sunday at IUCC was a joyful affair as we met inside our sanctuary for the first time in over a year!



Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes & Pastor Sarah



From the Pastor

by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Halverson-Cano, Senior Pastor



As a kid I always loved June because with June comes the anticipation of summer and the realization of it! Hot off the heels of Memorial Day and a taste of freedom, the countdown to summer vacation began! To me there's nothing like that satisfying feeling of ending a school year; not much of life is as neat and tidy as a school year wrap-up. There's such a defining line in that crossover from school to summer, an end of one year and the pause to regenerate before beginning another. For my family, there would often be a trip to Yosemite to look forward to, and there was always the promise of a week of Pilgrim Pines to greet us sometime midway through the stint of summer. June itself usually wasn't the month we'd go, but June was filled with the anticipation! It was a little bittersweet as we said goodbye to teachers and friends and a long school year, but this was always the fun part of the year, with last moment field trips, end of the year picnics and class parties that would soon be followed with pool parties!

Long after June marked the end of the school year, it's still filled with anticipation of what will come! There's an excitement in the month, a possibility of what lies before us, and an opportunity to reflect back on where we've been. Just a year ago, the I.U.C.C. search committee sat me down in a zoom room that looks so much like the zoom rooms we daily find ourselves in, but this zoom room was definitely filled with the Holy Spirit as they officially asked me to be their candidate to become your new pastor! Oh, what excitement! What anticipation! More than a handful of sadness as I imagined saying goodbye to the church I'd served and loved for 14 years, yet at the same time, June was filled with so much joy, excitement and imagination of all that was awaiting to unfold, and then at the end of the month you voted to officially call me and my journey home began! Talk about joyful anticipation!

What memories does June conjure up for you?

A look back at our recent past with May's full 5 Sundays reminds us of just how much ministry we can pack into a month! We began with an observation of Asian American Heritage Month and three guest pastors who graced us with their words of wisdom and challenge, followed up by a celebration of Mother's day complete with its original call to action that still resonates with us today as we think about gun control in the United States. I'm so proud that even though we don't have staff currently working in our Ministry with Young People, we pulled off an incredible Youth Sunday with wisdom, joy, creativity and fresh optimism! Then we gathered for Pentecost with all its glory as we felt the Spirit move among us for our first hybrid service! The month finished up with an observation of Trinity Sunday, which explored the doctrine and invited us into deeper theological reflection and reflected on Memorial Day and the high cost of war, particularly as we are mindful of what it means to be a Just Peace church. And those were just Sundays! Throw in an annual meeting, a youth room work day, in person gatherings for kids and grown-ups, a stimulating and timely film and discussion by Diversity and Inclusion and our Advocates, and more -- wow! We really are a church on fire!

And now we anticipate what comes next in this month of joyful anticipation. It's Pride month and I'll be on the lookout for rainbows! I know I'll find one at the Irvine City Hall --where else will you see rainbows this month? Well, right here on June 27th when we gather in person once more for our second hybrid service --be sure to come dressed in rainbows so we can celebrate together! Did you know this is our 30th anniversary as an Open and Affirming congregation? We're hoping to celebrate big next fall, but we'll start the celebration this month! We might not get to parade through Santa Ana this Pride month --but let's bring the parade back to where it started at I.U.C.C.: the first Open and Affirming congregation in Orange County!

So with hopeful anticipation, grateful reflection, realized joy and excitement of that which is to come, we welcome a new month of ministry together.

Grateful to be on this journey with you,
Your Pastor,
Sarah

From the Administrative Pastor

by the Rev. Steve Swope



As Orange County basks in its Yellow Tier status, we sense that life is starting to be reclaimed. We'll worship in person again on June 27. The Seekers will meet in Plumer Hall again on June 15. And Men's and Women's Breakfast groups will gather weekly.

But we've also learned how helpful virtual gatherings can be, particularly for those who may live at a distance or with some sort of limitation. So Ken Wyant's Tuesday Bible Study and my Wednesday Old Testament Study will continue online for now, with Zoom links provided in the Tuesday email update each week. And we'll hold our Comma Group Wrap-Up on Zoom, too, on Sunday, June 6 at 12:30 pm. If you were part of a Comma Group this year, you're invited to participate as we evaluate the past year and plan for the next.

Many thanks to everyone who helped get us to this point, with programming intact! And special thanks to Donnie Mineo and Julia Grace for work in the tech booth on May 23 – it takes more than 2 hands to bring live worship online!

As your groups start to return to the IUCC campus, please remember:

- schedule your event in advance with the office – check the website calendar for conflicts
- if you have technology needs, please talk with me well in advance
- think about the steps you need to take to keep everyone safe (ask me for a list!)
- plan to do some basic clean-up afterwards, so things are ready for the next group
- let me know if you see anything that needs to be fixed or corrected.

As summer approaches, let's get ready to enjoy it – safely!



Seekers met in person on 5/18!



On May 18, 14 women attended the first in-person Seekers gathering in over a year, plus 2 more joined in on Zoom!

--photo and caption by Steve Swope

Work Day in the Youth Room 5/27



Pastor Sarah shared photos and these words on Facebook: "Work day in the Youth Room! We didn't really take any before pictures, but you can begin to see the transformation by watching all the stuff go out! Thanks for the incentive to get on this Pam Jones Kamps - your gift of couches planted the seed to transform the space! MYP Chair Lauren Louie organized our work day and her husband aka Admin Chair Daniel and my husband Markyce Halverson-Cano and the miracle worker that is Linda Heath all came together to make this room an inviting, clean and organized space for our kids to come back to once the pandemic permits our safe return. Way to go team! It's absolutely AMAZING!"

From the Moderator

by *Tricia Aynes*



I was happy to see so many of your smiling faces during our Spring Congregational Meeting via Zoom on Sunday, May 16! We voted to ratify the Nominating Committee's list of recommended leaders, heard the treasurer's report, and received written reports from our ministry and committee chairs. I hope you had a chance to read over the reports,

because they were pretty impressive. Our leaders were able to accomplish some amazing things during the pandemic!

Our incoming officers, ministry chairs, and committee chairs will serve from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Some of them are continuing, while others are brand new. I'm looking forward to working with them and hearing about their ideas for IUCC. We'll be starting the new term with a Leadership Retreat in early July, and our retreat facilitator will be Dr. Cedrick Bridgeforth, a coach, consultant, strategist, educator, and pastor. He is sure to help us achieve clarity and consensus as we discuss our hopes and visions for the future.

Our Seekers group met LIVE in Plumer Hall on May 18, and they were thrilled to have the opportunity to catch up after such a long time apart! Conversation flowed freely as fully vaccinated friends had a chance to greet one another with hugs, warm smiles, and laughter.

What a joy it was to finally worship IN PERSON on May 23! There was a sea of cheerful red outfits to celebrate Pentecost Sunday and our first live reunion in over a year. We were jubilant and festive and SO delighted to be together again. There were a few tiny glitches as we combined our live service with taped segments, but overall it went extraordinarily well. Our talented staff and volunteers were able to live-stream it on Facebook as it was happening while also recording it to play again at 11 a.m. and all week long on demand. Quite the balancing act! Many kudos to the talented folks in the tech booth - Administrative Pastor Steve Swope, Julia Grace, and Donnie Mineo - for making it all go so smoothly!

IUCC will be holding its second in-person worship service at 9:30 a.m. on June 27. While we'll still need to be somewhat careful, I'm excited that we are starting to

return to some sense of normalcy. I'm sure you feel the same way!

I was fortunate to attend a recent collaborative event between our Advocates for Peace & Justice Ministry and our Diversity and Inclusion Ministry. We watched a video called "The Occupation of the American Mind" followed by a discussion moderated by Lulu Hammad, a Palestinian-American who was born and raised in Jordan. It was a very timely and enlightening event given recent developments in the Middle East, and it left participants better informed about the situation in Palestine/Israel. Many thanks to our volunteers in both ministries for making this presentation possible.

I continue to be an active participant on the Fund Development Committee (FDC) and the Child Care Committee (CCC). Both of these committees are filled with talented and diligent members who are working hard to sustain our church. The FDC has been discussing ways to create an inspirational legacy vision, while the CCC has been working to enhance the emotional well-being of our preschool staff. CCC members recently celebrated Teacher Appreciation Week with small gifts, posters, and a nice dinner for the preschool teachers. We owe special thanks to CCC members Linda Heath, Sandy Sudweeks, and Pastor Sarah for these efforts.

And speaking of the preschool, things are continuing to improve! For the first time in quite awhile, the ECC experienced its first small profit in March. While that was offset by a small loss in April, the trend is generally headed upwards. We are not "out of the woods" yet but we are starting to see modest gains, which is very encouraging. We are hopeful that with the state opening up on June 15, restrictions on class sizes will start to ease and we'll be allowed to accept more children.

Thank you all for your continuing support of our beloved church. We have managed to stay active and engaged in spite of pandemic setbacks. I look forward to seeing you in person again!

In hope and optimism,

Tricia

Mission & Service Ministry Opportunities



May/June Graduating Family Wish Lists

Family Promise has two families graduating in May/June! You can check out their wish lists and help them furnish their new homes by going to their website (see www.familypromiseorangecounty.org) and clicking on "Grad Family New Home Wish Lists." It will bring up a Google Drive spreadsheet with their needs.

Volunteer & Service Opportunities

You can view and sign up for all Family Promise of Orange County volunteer opportunities via their website (shown above). Current opportunities include:

- Garage Organization & Cleanout
- Home Painting Project
- Delivery Drivers
- Powerwashing Deck & Office Stairs
- Gardening & Yard Maintenance
- Movers

Bulletin Board

Family Promise is looking for a person to get trained in the operation of the Family Promise Shower Trailer to serve as an occasional backup when their regular volunteer goes on vacation. If you are interested in or have skills in mechanics, engineering, machinery, or the like, please reach out to them.

Family Promise is actively looking for potential Board Members. If a member of the congregation is interested in serving on their Board, please contact Cyndee Albertson albertson@familypromiseoc.org. They are especially looking for members with expertise in marketing, IT, human resources, philanthropy, or clergy members.

June's **bin collection** will be for a remarkable women's shelter and community called WisePlace. Check out their website at www.wiseplace.org. Here is who they are:

WISEPlace is the only Orange County-based nonprofit leading the effort to end homelessness for unaccompanied women. They provide women with safe shelter, counseling and mental health services, case management and addiction recovery, and employment assistance to help rebuild their lives. We are collecting the following to help support their "Summer Bash" event:

- Large Beach Totes
- Beach Towels
- Mini Umbrellas (fit in purse or backpack)
- Sunscreen
- Lip Balm

We ask that you make your donations by June 20th. Their event is in early July and they want each attendee to get a complete tote at the event. Anything you can contribute would be greatly appreciated. If you want to order through Amazon, their list is there to make it easy:

www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/25RZW000NA6FW?ref=wl_share

Shop Their Summer Bash Wish List

When you purchase items from their Amazon Summer Bash Wish List, you are supplying the women with the essentials they need to stay cool and comfortable during the warm months ahead.

It's as easy as the click of a button to provide cool weather necessities, such as sunscreen, tote bags, and sunglasses! Your donation will be presented to the women at WISEPlace during their annual Summer Bash in July. Brighten the day of a woman in need!

Thank you for supporting this Mission & Services bin collection and this amazing organization.

Hospitality, Disaster Awareness, & Disaster Preparedness

by Alex Ingal, Hospitality Chair



Good morning, afternoon, and/or evening my fellow IUCCers!

Hospitality wants to take this time to raise disaster awareness but first... Do you like to talk or quietly listen to other people talk? Do you enjoy smiles and controllable human interactions? Well, look no further than IUCC Zoom Coffee Hour!

After every service, you have the opportunity to join your fellow IUCCers in conversation. Don't like to talk? Well, just stop by and listen to others! I promise that nearly every Zoom Coffee Hour will sport Daisy in one of her cute dresses and cute puppy eyes. The zoom link is found in every Friday e-blast as well as posted in the comments section during service. The same link will work each time so feel free to just save the link somewhere. If you haven't been to a Zoom Coffee Hour, drop by! You can leave at any time!

Ok, now that the plug is out of the way, disaster awareness. Hospitality wants everyone to make their habitat hospitable this summer. You may think your home is hospitable, but kill the electricity and potable water for a week, and could you still count your home hospitable? Climate change has caused the environment of nearly every location to shift (and most of the time in unfavorable ways).

Here in California, we face earthquakes, a poor electric grid (not as bad as Texas), and wildfires! In fact, year to date, we are up 30% in wildfire incidences. Remember how bad last year was for wildfires? Well, add 30% to that and this is what is being predicted for this year! So, take time now and invest in a mobile disaster kit. There isn't exactly a "one size fits all" kit but there are some guidelines you should follow. Your first step is to visit [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov), where you will find details about most disasters (though they don't list what to do for disastrous dinner dishes). If you scroll down, there will be an option for "Build a Kit."

While I am sure everyone here can read (since you are reading this now...I hope), there are a few points of interest that you might overlook or not think of. Do you have a current disaster preparedness kit? If so, how old is it? Nothing lasts forever. Before the wildfire season starts, make sure the batteries are still good, food is still good, and water is still good (yes, water can expire). Can't find expiration dates? Well, sample the product and see if it functions as intended. Have you avoided building a disaster kit because it is a waste of resources as you will 'never' use it? Well...instead of buying the food that lasts 20 years, just buy canned food that you normally use. And rotate out stock. For example, we have a box of canned beans. Once I use up the beans in my kitchen, I buy more beans

and put those in the disaster kit, and I take the beans from the disaster kit and put it on my shelf. The goal of the kit is to just survive long enough for FEMA to rescue you, so you only need a week or so of dedicated supplies. Also, is your kit portable? If not, get a wagon or a suitcase on wheels. If a major earthquake occurs or you wake up to seeing a wildfire outside of your window, the LAST thing you have time for is 20 trips from your disaster kit to your destination (i.e., your car).



Unless you start the disaster, no one expects to be in a disaster, but everyone has the ability to increase their survivability chance in the event of a disaster. Make your hospitable home more hospitable and create/inspect your disaster kit BEFORE the next disaster!

Alex Ingal (he, him, his)

Hospitality Chair

News & Events

Conference Annual Gathering

June 11 & 12 - Online

Our Southern California Nevada Conference is holding its Annual Gathering virtually again this year.

Featured speakers are the Rev. Jacqueline L. Lewis, Senior Minister for Public Theology & Transformation at Middle Church in New York City and Acting Conference Minister Rev. Libby Tigner.

You can register for this virtual gathering here:

<https://www.scncucc.org/ag2021>



Comma Group Wrap-Up Discussion

Sunday, June 6, 12:30 p.m.

Our Comma Groups met online this year, and they flourished! All participants are invited to join together on Zoom for the Comma Group Wrap-Up discussion. Here's the link to join:

<https://zoom.us/j/95321044202?pwd=b3dOeDZKOE0yazMyWURqVGIXcEhaQT09>



Volunteers Wanted for MYP

Connect & Make a Difference with IUCCC Children & Youth

Vacation Bible School is coming in late summer! We invite volunteers who want to help plan, conduct activities, or just sit in and spend time with the kids.

There are all kinds of ways to help! You can teach Sunday School, sit in and watch the kids, have fun as a chaperone, act as tech support, share event ideas, work an event, organize or participate together in service projects...we would love to have you!

Want to learn more or ready to jump in? Email Lauren Louie.



The Seeker's Women's Group

Tuesday, June 15, 9:30 a.m.

Plumer Hall

The Seekers will meet in person for theological and spiritual study and discussion. Newcomers are always welcome!



6/14	Jennifer Blackburn	6/30	Sylvia McDonald
6/19	Howard Emery	6/21	Lester Ricks
6/12	Melissa Gaskill	6/10	Cara Ruiz
6/20	Rachel Gregory	6/19	Joan Thompson
6/10	Reefa Hanenberger	6/15	Cheryl Trobiani
6/08	June Kenny	6/17	Emily Wetherby
6/06	Eric Lutz	6/26	Lesley Wheland
6/06	Rachel McCallum	6/09	Ken Wyant
6/18	Sara McComb	6/02	William Zane

PART TWO: Racial Justice - I've Got a Lot to Learn

by Vivian Elaine Johnson



Last month I wrote about my childhood and youth with its limited and incorrect view of people of color. As I moved into adulthood, I began to understand that my worldview would be enhanced and broadened through reading, and I also found it important to have personal interaction with people different from myself. In my early

twenties I read *Black Like Me*, a 1961 book authored by John Howard Griffin, a white news reporter who chemically darkened his skin and made other physical changes, then lived temporarily as a Black man in a community in the south. I was awakened and shaken by the ill treatment and lack of respect he received – all because of the color of his skin.

I married George, a Lutheran pastor, and we moved to California. In the summer of 1961, George and I took church teenagers on a bus through the south to attend a youth convention in Miami, Florida. One parent forbade his son to attend because Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was to be the keynote speaker. The father said, “I don’t want my son to hear that communist.” Fortunately, the bus trip and convention were tremendous learning experiences for the forty-eight young people who attended from our church – and for us. We encountered “whites only” and “no colored allowed” signs in bus stations, bathrooms, on drinking fountains, and in parks.

In the latter 1960s, our church began to have pulpit-exchange Sundays with a congregation of Black members. The pastors and choirs exchanged churches one Sunday per year. The services and coffee hours offered opportunities to have some conversations of greater depth. Next, we connected with a community organizer in a Black community and planned a summer vacation church school where we brought our children and teachers to their community, invited their participation, and conducted the school in a park. The children – Black and White -- had great fun learning and playing together while the teachers also experienced the joy of diversity.

Then tragedy struck. Dr. King was assassinated in 1968. Our twelve-year-old son, Todd, stood in the kitchen by our small TV and wept passionately as he watched the news report. Our family admired Dr. King and were pained by this violent assault on a person of justice and non-violence. ⁸

By then, I had a spirit of “caring” about people of color. However, I found it difficult to understand why other races/ colors sometimes didn’t trust white people. I wondered why people of color could be upset with people like me, people who cared. After all, weren’t we just trying to help?

Interestingly, some Palestine Liberation members (PLO) addressed this issue for me. We were living in Sweden in 1980 where several Middle Eastern political refugees, including PLO members, had found safety. I learned from them that people of a different race/color can be suspicious because our motives as white people, no matter how loving or genuine, are looked at through their former experiences. Palestinians and Israelis have been at war for years. I was interested in the PLO political refugees and asked them questions - too many questions, from their viewpoint. They distrusted my interest, causing them to determine that I was an Israeli spy. It turned out that the Swedish equivalent to our FBI met with me and worked with me to maintain my safety. The political refugees’ mistrust was based on the previous experiences they had endured. Not accustomed to people’s genuine concern, they assumed I was in league with their enemy. Now I was beginning to understand the power of negative experiences.

George and I spent a 6-week sabbatical in 1993 in the Republic of South Africa. Apartheid was still in existence. We taught at the sole university for Blacks, the University of Ft. Hare on the south coast, and at Umpemulo, a seminary on the East coast. We had interactions with very diverse Black families. One was a sophisticated family, that of Sibusisu Bengu, President of the University, with whom we interacted on several occasions, one being their daughter’s wedding. Both the bride and groom were physicians. I observed exquisite manners, rich conversation, and warm cordiality, often more genteel than mine or my white friends. A second Black family we visited lived in a Black township twenty miles from the city of their closest employment. Their family of ten lived in a cow dung, cardboard, and tin home, the humblest of humble dwellings. They shared a water spigot with twenty families and subsisted mainly on a root that when boiled resembled our cream of wheat. As we sipped on tea in their tiny abode, we experienced their generosity, strength, and compassion. I asked myself why they were so under-privileged and I so over-privileged.

These experiences showed me the danger of stereotyping people of color. Whether abroad or in our country, they are as diverse as any other people. While I was beginning to learn about racism, I still didn’t understand my personal biases, nor did I understand systemic racism. I had a lot to learn. (To be continued next month.)

Powerful Parenting **AFTER THE STORM**

by Dr. Lorraine Fox



When a storm impacts our lives, the first task for a person or a family is to assess the damage. We don't know how to make a plan for repair until we carefully assess what has happened and what needs to be done. Last month, we talked about walking out the door of our homes after over a year of isolation, social distance, and completely revamped

routines. While many scholars and casual observers are making various predictions about what will be different for individuals and communities, most agree that we will have to "wait and see" how people have weathered the total disruption of previous ways of living. Yesterday I visited my favorite restaurant for lunch after not being there since before everything shut down. I had my choice of sitting inside or outside. Before the pandemic there was no outside seating. While inconsequential in the scheme of things, it was a clear illustration of my need to acknowledge that we will not quickly be returning to "things as they were."

Parents and others involved in creating safety and well-being for children will now be asked to notice, adapt to, and accommodate differences both within each young person and without in terms of differences in their environment. While it was a petty complaint, I didn't like seeing tents and tables set up in the parking lot. It didn't feel right. If I was still working with children I would tell myself to keep this in mind as children find changes in previously familiar spaces unnerving, and to be kind about their complaints, even though – in the scheme of things – these will not seem like a "big deal." They will be for some.

You remember what it was like when you left out part of a story during your bedtime reading, or forgot to "roar" when you said the word lion. Children like things to be the same. It's why they prefer videos over being read to. Videos don't change anything and are exactly the same every time they watch. No omissions or changes; no surprises.

Last month we mentioned being ready for both differences in adapting to external changes and differences in the children themselves. Children and teens will differ in terms of their experiences, and they will differ in the internal resources they brought to the difficult year and now to new adjustments. We will spend some time reviewing what are referred to as differences in "resiliency," or the ability to come through and recover from difficult or traumatic challenges. Research has revealed that differences in resiliency are more important to long term effects of crises and trauma than the actual event a child experiences. (This is also true for adults.)

We know that individuals of all ages (including babies) vary in terms of their ability to withstand adversity. Some people are born with what are called "innate" qualities that enable them to "stretch" or adapt more easily to difficult situations, or to endure difficulties with more "hardiness" and to recover more easily from physical and emotional challenges than others. Some toddlers fall on

the floor and immediately begin to cry; other toddlers fall on the floor and just get up and keep going. Some kids bump into furniture and cry because they "hurt themselves" while others show up to the table with a bruise on their head that they don't remember getting. Some kids cry when you scold them; others give you a look that says "Who cares what you think?"



Resiliency – the ability to weather the storm better than others – is a combination of life experiences + innate internal strengths.

We'll review a number of each of these to provide a framework for you to "inspect" the various degrees of damage to your own children, or to children you have responsibility for. It is a somewhat trite saying that "no two people are alike," but that truth is also a very profound one. I think it is a truth that makes life most interesting, but also most challenging. The greatest gift a parent or caring adult can give a child is to "see them" – that is, to take the trouble to look both inside and outside and see who they really are. Each is different. Each is special. And then to help them "see" themselves. Comparing a child to anyone else is a great disservice. How old they are. Who their parents are. Where they live. None of these explain who they are. Taking the trouble to see who they are will allow us to give them the help and support they need to be successful in their post-Covid journey. It will also help us with our unconditional love.

The Beauty of Benches

by Tricia Aynes

I've always thought of benches as lovely things. They provide a welcome place to sit and catch my breath when I'm tired, and they are quiet evidence of another person's thoughtfulness for a stranger's comfort and well-being. Some kind soul from the past thought this would be the perfect spot to provide relief to future visitors, and they were right. Like a cool breeze or a refreshing drink, benches provide the perfect balm on a hot and humid afternoon.

Oftentimes, a bench will include a plaque engraved with a name and a few loving words – a beautiful remembrance of someone special. Benches are tangible proof of warm memories and gratitude as well as pleasant places for weary sojourners to sit and rest.

Quite recently, my appreciation for benches has been freshly renewed. As my family and I have begun to venture forth after a year of staying home, we've discovered that benches are not only wonderful places for contemplation, they are also golden opportunities for magic to happen.

Not long ago, my younger daughter Mira and I were at Huntington Gardens. It was a warm day, and we'd been walking a long time. We were ready for a rest. We came to the spot on the lower gardens where the koi ponds are located.

As luck would have it, a family was in the process of vacating a nicely placed bench overlooking one of the lovely koi ponds. We moved in quickly to take a seat, planning to watch the colorful fish swim by. Much to our amazement, within a few seconds two sets of adult Canada geese with eight goslings came waddling into view and proceeded to float around the pond! The adults floated serenely across the water, babies in tow, and fed on the tall, thick reeds. Several times, they came out of the water very close to us, munching away.

We sat very still and took it all in, mesmerized and delighted by the experience. A few times, families with

kids came by, and the noise and activity scared the geese back into the water. But by and large, everyone was very respectful and kept their distance, allowing the birds to float in peace. After a few minutes, the geese waddled back out of the pond and wandered over to a grassy area.

Ever since then, Mira and I have made a point of sitting on benches and waiting for magic to happen. We tried it again on a recent trip to Catalina Island and were not disappointed. The first time, we were treated to the sight of a beautiful falcon landing on a light post! To be sure, it was accompanied by a handler, but we were thrilled nevertheless.

A little later the same day, we sat on a bench overlooking the harbor at sunset. Again, we were treated to a lovely surprise

as the clouds changed from white to pink and the light twinkled on the water. I decided that the pink cloud looked like a huge egret with outstretched wings, caught mid flight. What do you think?

I've decided that the real lesson of benches is to stop, be still, and pay attention to our surroundings. A lot of special things won't happen if we rush by heedlessly and scare away the magic. Benches are God's way of telling us to just BE in the moment and appreciate the wonders of nature: to contemplate and absorb the beauty of creation.

Mira and I have a pact that whichever one of us survives the other will arrange to have a nice bench erected on a lovely spot – the survivor gets to choose. I can't think of a better way to remember someone than to provide a comfortable and serene place to contemplate God's creation, reflect, and wait for the magic to happen.

Wishing you blessings and peace, my friends.

Tricia



Let's Talk! Some Thoughts and Ideas for Having Healthy Discussions About Racism, White Privilege, Diversity and Inclusion

by Dr. Eduardo Jesús Arismendi-Pardi

Adult Education Ministries, and Diversity and Inclusion Task Force



I am very grateful and humble to have had the incredible experience of being a part of creating the Diversity and Inclusion (d-and-i) Ministry at IUCC. As I reflect on the significant progress we have made, I would be selfish not to acknowledge the many congregants who have contributed and participated in the important

work of diversity and inclusion—this is difficult work.

Co-chairing this ministry with Lesli Mitchell and Jenna Wadsworth-McCarty has been challenging at times and yet rewarding. There are many others who deserve recognition but the list is numerous and the parameters for space within the newsletter limit my ability to mention each person. However, I want to thank all of you who have participated in our ministry. We have had wonderful speakers and presentations from a gamut of persons—both members of the clergy and laypersons—ranging in age, ethnicity, experience, profession, and educational background. I decided to write this article because I wish to share with you how I, personally, deal with the challenges associated with having difficult conversations about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion.

Discussions about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion are very difficult and can be emotionally draining, causing people to feel uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. Our commitment to supporting and welcoming the LGBTQIA+ community is, in many ways, the hallmark of IUCC. In a like manner, expanding our circle of inclusion to embrace ethnic and cultural diversity is but one example of how IUCC is responding to the issues that affect our social dynamic. I sincerely hope that this article will create enough interest for you to participate in our discussions and find healthy and safe strategies to address and challenge racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion. As a result of our efforts I have learned how privileged I am as a function of my phenotypic characteristics as well as my socioeconomic privilege in relation to my chosen profession.

I was recently asked how I, as a Latinx, deal with conversations about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion. The answer to that question is addressed within this article. Learning how to communicate, for example, about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion, police violence, mass incarceration, economic inequality, or the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine requires practice while demanding courage and skill.

In my experience as a Latinx, I have discovered that the reason for avoidance of such conversations is a function of fear of misspeaking, sounding racist, or unintentionally doing harm. The way I personally deal with discussions about diversity and inclusion - within my profession, as a member of a worship community, and as a member of society - rests upon three distinctive constructs: (a)

finding comfort in my discomfort, (b) being vulnerable, and (c) addressing strong emotions. Finding comfort in my discomfort, for me, is about trying to understand what someone is saying while exercising grace before rushing to judgment or firing out a response without consideration for the recipient. Being vulnerable, for me, is about my willingness to engage in difficult conversations that can arise from my own fears of being vulnerable. Addressing strong

emotions is about being aware that racism is like smog in that we all breathe it in and are all harmed by it.



In my personal experience, I have found that I need to take a lot of breaks in terms of responding with a high degree of empathy and emotional intelligence when having difficult conversations with others about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion. In other words, I have found much wisdom in some words I once read from a source written by a very wise spiritual man who voluntarily chose anonymity, rather than secular prominence as a demonstration of his humility. This man's words are worth quoting: "Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen. We must avoid quick-tempered criticism and furious, power-driven argument. The same goes for sulking or silent scorn. These are emotional booby traps baited with pride and vengefulness."

The work of diversity and inclusion is absolutely difficult and progress may sometimes seem so slow that it can cause one to feel discouraged, frustrated or unheard. However, an antidote to feeling discouraged, frustrated or unheard has led me to incorporate the *R→C→R→C Model*, that is, *Reiterate→Contemplate→Respire→Communicate* as a strategy for graceful communication about difficult topics. In terms of having difficult conversations, I also try to keep in mind that being uncomfortable should not mean being unsafe.

The *Reiterate* Step allows me to restate what I heard (reflective listening) which helps me focus on what I actually heard rather than on what I think I heard, which minimizes miscommunication and misinformation. The *Contemplate* Step allows me to count to 10 or maybe up to 25 before responding (exercising restraint of the tongue and pen). Taking time out before responding has allowed me to move away from immediate emotional responses that can cause unintended harm which can derail the conversation. The *Respire* Step allows me to take a deep breath and check in with myself and put everything in perspective to allow my thoughts and emotions to settle during difficult conversations. The *Communicate* Step allows me to speak with compassion and thoughtfulness and to seek understanding, and if there is disagreement, to keep in mind that the disagreement is not with the person but rather with what was said by using phrases such as “Help me understand why you feel this way” or “I need more clarification” or “How did you arrive at your conclusion?”

The point of the *R→C→R→C Model* is to have an empathetic and respectful conversation. Sometimes there may be no agreement and in this case I would use what I have learned from Rev. Steve Swope in one of his Sunday school classes, that is, “Well, I just have a different way of looking at this,” which is another way of converging to my interpretation of Rev. Swope’s lesson which I can rephrase as “Well, we will just have to agree to disagree agreeably” and then move on. I have discovered that one way to have a healthy discussion about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion is to be willing to embrace one of the six possible responses, that is: (a) I am uncomfortable and cannot move on, (b) I am uncomfortable and need some help before I can move on, (c) I am a little uncomfortable but I want to try to move on, (d) I am not sure how I am feeling, (e) I am comfortable enough to move on, or (f) I am ready to move on.

Another strategy I have found helpful in my experience is to:

1. Repeat what I wish to say in an empathic manner;
2. Think (count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,...) and remember the acronym *T.H.I.N.K.* (The acronym *T.H.I.N.K.* means is it *True?* Is it *Helpful?* Is it *Important?* Is it *Necessary?* Is it *Kind?*);
3. Breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth; and
4. Put myself in another’s shoes.

Finally, respectful conversation about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion must be carried out in a spirit of trust and love by:

- Treating others with whom we disagree respectfully to gain their trust;
- Learning about the various positions on the topic of disagreement;
- Stating what we think we heard and asking for clarification before responding to ensure mutual understanding;
- Sharing our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with the teachings of the historical Jesus;
- Focusing on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people’s motives, intelligence, or integrity;
- Sharing our personal experience about the subject of disagreement so that others may fully understand our concerns;
- Indicating where we agree with those other viewpoints as well as where we disagree;
- Seeking to stay in community with those with whom we disagree; and
- Praying to seek God’s grace rather than praying for triumph of our viewpoints while remaining open to the vision God has for us all.

I truly hope that we at IUCC can just talk and explore thoughts and ideas for having healthy discussions about racism, White privilege, diversity and inclusion.

Healing from Racial Trauma

by Matt Mirmak

33 years is a long time to hold on to a secret. So why did I hold on to this secret for as long as I did? At the time that this incident happened, I did not feel comfortable discussing it with anyone except for the one person who I trusted on campus: my college football coach. Looking back, I did not want to be put in a position where I was constantly defending myself to people who would automatically doubt my story because they thought I was pulling the proverbial “race card.”

To give you a little historical background information about this story: Back when I was a freshman at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there was an alumnus by the name of Elroy Stock who donated a lot of money to the college to help our campus improve its infrastructure. One of his major “gifts” to the college was the sum of \$500,000 to help build a new chapel and media center on campus. Stock was lauded by our college president as a generous man who “worked hard and saved his money.” So why would anyone complain about his “generosity”?

What was eventually revealed over a matter of time was that over several years, Mr. Stock had a penchant for sending out anonymous letters to students and alumni who were in mixed race relationships, non-white, and of mixed race. The context of the letters would espouse the “necessity” to keep the integrity of the college’s Scandinavian and Lutheran roots “pure and free” from undesirable traits. One of the “undesirable traits” that Elroy Stock despised was interracial relationships. The media got ahold of these anonymous letters that students and alumni had received. Eventually, Elroy Stock confessed without any apology that he was the source of the letters. He claimed that he did it “out of love for the college and their Scandinavian heritage” and meant to “educate” those of us who did not fit his view of racial purity and our “respect” for his Scandinavian heritage. He even went so far as to grant an interview to our student newspaper to “give his side of the story,” which pretty much amplified and humanized his racist beliefs. In his interview, he said he stopped sending the letters to people in 1987.

I wish I could say he was telling the truth. During my third week as a student on campus in September 1988, I went to check my mailbox in the Christensen Center and found two letters. One was from my parents with a check for \$50. The other was an anonymous letter addressed “to whom it may concern.” In this letter, the writer espoused the necessity of keeping the college’s Scandinavian roots

“pure and free” from things like interracial relationships and inter-religious relationships. I felt that this person found out that I am mixed race Asian (Thai/white) and had parents from two different religious upbringings (Dad is Protestant, Mom is Buddhist). And how would the letter writer know about my racial background and my parents’ religious affiliations? The coaching staff didn’t publicize the fact that I was the first Asian American in our football team’s history. My teammates knew that I was of mixed race but never made an issue of it. I never discussed my parents’ religious affiliations with anyone. I could not help but feel after reading this letter that someone found out about my mixed race Asian background and did not want me to be on campus. At this point, I felt very powerless and concerned for my own personal safety. I also began to question who I could trust on campus.

The controversy over the Stock donation and his racist letter-writing campaign would arise two weeks later. I have no doubt that he was the author of this letter and that someone tipped him off that I was enrolled as a student at Augsburg. After receiving this letter, the only person I developed a trusting relationship with was the head football coach. I went into his office and showed him the letter. You would think that the leadership of a college would listen to a coach or teacher when he said “one of my players or students received this letter and does not feel safe on campus.” I do not fault my coach for what happened and believe that he did everything possible to protect me as he would have done with any of his other players.

In a just world, you would think that a college would immediately refuse the donation and condemn the actions of this donor. Instead, our college administration kept the money and made excuses for Stock’s behavior. It felt as if my concerns for my safety and well being did not matter to the administration. During this time, a group of gay and lesbian students were trying to start up a support group on campus. Internally seething with anger over the administration’s and the student senate’s lack of response to the racist letters that were sent to various students, I developed a huge resentment towards this gay and lesbian group which I felt was trying to take focus away from an issue that deeply affected me. Because the group was primarily white people, all I could see was that the feelings and concerns of the white students were given priority over those of us who were non-white. A few years later, I admitted that I was wrong to take my hurt feelings out on a group that had nothing to do with what I experienced. They did not send the letters, nor were they in a position to make a decision on how to handle the donations of money to our campus.

Before I left for school, my mother told me to “study hard, keep your head low, and don’t cause trouble.” I don’t know why we are told this by our elders in Thai culture, but I guess there was some sort of expectation that hard work would be rewarded by the dominant culture. It is that advice that convinced me to internalize these feelings of alienation and betrayal on behalf of a college that was supposedly a welcoming environment. I ended up telling my football coach not to press the issue because I felt like I would have been an unnecessary burden on the school. I also did not want to be subject to a number of inquiries where I would be constantly defending myself and enduring questions from white students asking if what I was experiencing was really racism. When the white RA on my dorm floor said something to me about me not knowing what experiencing discrimination and racism is like, I took that as a clue to keep my mouth shut if I was to survive on the campus. Looking at who the dominant culture was in the campus environment also provided a clue that maybe I should just be quiet and move along like nothing happened.

Outside of my football coach, I did not mention this incident to anyone within my immediate circle. I felt that my coach was the only person I could trust since he made sincere efforts to make me feel welcome on campus. And it wasn’t because he needed roster depth on the defensive line. I kept quiet about this incident for 33 years and recently have been coming to terms with what happened to me. Unfortunately, the allure of alcohol between the years of 1988-1993 provided a brief relief where I did not have to deal with the pain and racial trauma I experienced. A swig of the bottle would make me forget that this incident happened. The one swig became two and then multiplied to the point where drinking alcohol became a daily habit. I was still able to function highly as a student and athlete. Once the party hour reared its ugly head, though, it was lights out. When I stopped drinking on September 10, 1993, I had to find a way to deal with these issues without medicating myself. Although I have been abstinent from alcohol for almost 28 years, the internal work in the recovery process is a lifelong journey.

I honestly do not know how things would have been different for me if the college had acted and taken the racist letter that I received seriously. The silver lining out of this whole unfortunate incident is that the students of color now are the majority of the student body on the Augsburg University campus and there is a serious commitment to cultural diversity. The campus is a better place for not only students of color, but for LGBTQ students as well. Since I just recently mentioned what happened to me, I have had fellow alumni ask why I didn’t say

something sooner. Because I felt like I couldn’t. Because I thought that no one would believe me and think I was making up this story. I am still trying to find a way to forgive Elroy Stock and our former college president Charles Anderson for this incident. To be honest, I am not there yet when it comes to forgiving them for what they did to me. Unfortunately, both of these men have passed on without any remorse or regret for their actions. I do know that holding on to this secret for 33 years was not healthy. I have done some outside work to deal with the past racial trauma that I have experienced. It has been real helpful not only for my personal recovery from substance use disorder, but my overall quality of life.

The best thing that my fellow alumni did when I made this confession of receiving the racist letter from Elroy Stock was not go into a devil’s advocate mode by questioning the validity of my claims. They did not say that “I should have said something sooner.” Nor did they try to congratulate themselves on their good deeds while trivializing my concerns and feelings. We could go into the should of, would of, could of scenarios of this incident until we are blue in the face. The fact that I still felt unsafe and felt that I had no place to go for support remains unchanged. The fact that I have decided to now talk about what happened has been helpful in the healing and recovery process from racial trauma.

For me, the work that I do to dismantle white supremacy and systemic racism is a matter of life and death. My people in the Asian American community are being targeted, attacked, and killed thanks to systematic racism and white supremacy as I write this article. It is my way of saying that I will no longer allow myself to be rendered invisible. It is my way of saying that I am not a perpetual foreigner and that I do belong in this country. It is my way of saying that my humanity and dignity is more important than accepting a \$500,000 donation. Through the healing and recovery process from racial trauma, I have been given the strength and courage to let go of toxic people and relationships that do not respect my dignity and humanity as an Asian American. I am tired and exhausted of having to explain to white people how white supremacy and systemic racism have affected me as an Asian American. Instead of expending more emotional labor and energy in engaging in a dialogue with the willfully ignorant and with people who benefit from privilege that minimizes my life experiences, I’ve decided the best course of action is to detach myself from these people and not engage with them. It is not my responsibility to educate them when they refuse to do the work to dismantle the systems that they reap benefits from. Nor is my humanity and dignity up for debate. I would rather work on uplifting and

The Efficacy of Prayer

Reverend Dr. Jerry von Talge



Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6-7)

Many books and articles have been written on prayer. This article will cover the psychological, scientific, faith/spiritual, and metaphysical aspects of prayer. There are many psychological benefits to prayer. The so-called *Serenity Prayer* used by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was written by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in 1932. This short but powerful prayer has helped thousands of persons during the Great Depression, as well as thousands of Alcoholics who have joined AA:

[O God and Heavenly Father,] *Grant to us the **serenity** of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; **courage** to change that which can be changed, and **wisdom** to know the one from the other, [through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.]*

Prayer can be self-soothing and self-comforting when one is experiencing pain, coping with loss, or dealing with stressful or traumatic circumstances. Prayer can also be productive in achieving personal goals. It can help people focus on the well-being of others. It can help with anxiety, sadness, and sleep problems. Prayer can also influence our thinking, creating more positive thoughts. Prayer can increase our feelings of well-being. When a person is stuck in life, when nothing can possibly be done, at least the act of prayer is doing something.

Rob Whitley, PhD, has written an article in *Psychology Today* relating the *Serenity Prayer* to the COVID-19 crisis:

All this has created much misery, loneliness, and despair; however, the serenity prayer does not demand that we simply passively tolerate this situation. While we must accept the reality of the COVID-19 crisis, the serenity prayer demands that we actively respond to this situation with positive action. Indeed, that is the focus of the second sentence, which is a call-to-arms to take "courage to change the things I can."

He suggests such things as: (1) Rekindling dormant hobbies such as arts, crafts, reading, or writing; (2) Mastering new skills, such as learning a language or playing a musical instrument; (3) Utilizing new technology to renew social connections with friends old and new; (4) Engaging in spiritual activities, such as meditation, mindfulness, and prayer; and (5) Engage in physical activity, such as yoga, indoor workouts, and walks in the park.

Due to the lack of sufficient funding, there have only been a few scientific studies on the efficacy of prayer. Most of the studies have involved the use of prayer for healing medical patients. Research studies have failed to establish the efficacy of prayer for physical healing. However, scientific research has validated significant changes in the brain during both prayer and meditation.

From a faith/spiritual point of view, prayer has a great deal of power. There is a reciprocal relationship between our faith in Jesus and the power of prayer. Prayer increases our faith, and faith increases the efficacy of our praying. Also, practicing prayer on a regular basis not only can increase our faith but also can increase the efficacy of our praying. Prayer can bring us into a closer relationship with Jesus and increase our feeling of the presence of God within us and in the world around us. Prayer increases our gratitude and helps us to concentrate and focus on what is truly most important in life. This helps us to better align our time and our behavior with what is most important.

Is there a metaphysical aspect to prayer? Progressive Christians are loathe to posit an interventionist God. This is not to deny the presence of the spirit of God all around us. Certainly, the presence of God's spirit/energy must have some influence/impact on all of life around us. Also, the spirit of God is within each one of us.

My "major" at the Pacific School of Religion theological seminary in Berkeley (in the mid-60s) was existential theology and philosophy. The existential theology was primarily that of Paul Tillich. The existentialism that appealed most to me was that of Albert Camus and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both, but especially Camus, rejected any "metaphysical appeal." This is a point where I differ with both Camus and Nietzsche. I believe that there is a metaphysical aspect to prayer. This metaphysical aspect of prayer includes the spiritual. This is purely a personal spiritual belief, with no scientific, analytical, or linear

“The Efficacy of Prayer” continued from Page 15

underpinnings. It is a faith statement. I believe there is a spiritual power from prayer. Everything in life is energy, including our bodies, when looking from the vantage point of the most micro level. I believe that in some way, when we send out positive energy from our thoughts/brains, especially in prayer, this positive energy attracts and combines with other forms of positive energy. There are all kinds of synergistic possibilities and permutations. From this comes a metaphysical efficacy of prayer where science and rational understanding have no domain.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen



“Healing from Racial Trauma” continued from Page 14

amplifying voices in my community and other communities of color since this country was built on the backs of their labor. Life is too short to hold on to toxic people who bring you down emotionally or internalize secrets that will eventually eat you up on the inside.

Editor’s Note: News accounts at the time show that the U.S. Postal Service, responding to hundreds of complaints, tracked Stock down after a lengthy investigation. Stock admitted to sending an estimated 100,000 such anonymous letters over the course of many years. While Augsburg College did remove his name from a building he helped pay for, it kept his donation.

Stock later sued the college, but his case was dismissed because it fell outside the Statute of Limitations. The appellate case of Elroy Stock vs. Augsburg College, et al., State of Minnesota Court of Appeals C1-01-1673, held as fact that Stock “had for years been secretly mailing anonymous letters to families and individuals of mixed race and religion. These letters denounced mixed marriages, professing a viewpoint based on racial purity ...”

Augsburg College has since established a \$500,000 scholarship and mentor program for minority students in an effort to atone and bring something positive from the situation.

IUCC Church Officers for 2020-2021

The congregation voted to ratify the following slate of officers at the Spring Congregational Meeting on May 16:

Moderator	Tricia Aynes
Administrative Board	
Admin Board Chair	Daniel Blackburn
Treasurer	Mark Allen
Admin Board Clerk	Laura Palen
Congregational Reps (3)	Jon Ingal Chuck Heath Shanthi Nataraj
Ministries Board	
Ministries Board Chair	Felicity Figueroa
Ministries Board Clerk	Karolyn Fencil
Adult Programs Chairs	Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi/ Craig Repp
Advocates Chairs	Craig Repp/-----
Communication Chairs	Cindy O’Dell/Alex Ingal
Congregational Care Chairs	Kathi Smith/Diane Rust -----
Deacons Chair	Jenna McCarty/Lesli Mitchell/Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi
Diversity & Inclusion	Alyssa Cornett
Fellowship Chair	Alex Ingal
Hospitality Chair	Randy Romine/ Kaytee McDonald
Membership Chairs	Lauren Louie
Ministry for Young People	Steve Goetz/Sharon Lynn
Mission & Service Chairs	Pat Sauter
Music Ministry Chair	Jeanne Maag/ Cheryl Trobiani
Stephen Ministry Chairs	Craig Tyrll
Worship Chair	
Committee Chairs	
Building & Grounds Chair	-----
Bylaws/P & P Chair	Anne Rosse
Child Care Committee Chair	Keith Boyum
Fund Development Chair	Renaey Boyum
Human Resources Chair	Dale Vaughan
Technology Chair	-----

Dashes indicate a vacant position. If you are interested in filling one of these positions, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee (Tricia Aynes, Felicity Figueroa, Daniel Blackburn, Pastor Sarah, or Randy Romine). Please note that our bylaws require all church officers, ministry chairs, and committee chairs to be corporate members of IUCC.



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